Traditional Marriage Systems and Procedures in Central Izon of Niger Delta and North East Yoruba Land of Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract- Marriage is a union between two (sometimes more) people especially a man and a woman. It is a universal concept and is as old as the human race. Marriage is an aspect of culture and culture is not static. But somehow every generation tries to preserve aspects of the indigenous tradition. Hence we can talk of traditional marriage system. This cultural institution is held in very high esteem hence its importance cannot be overemphasized as it is one of the basically socially acceptable relationships among human beings. As universal as this institution is the ceremonies, rituals or what generally constitutes acceptability in marriage may differ from one ethnic group to the other. The purpose/aims of this paper therefore is to examine the marriage customs and practices in Central Izon and North East Yoruba land of Nigeria. The methodology used in this research work is document analysis. The highlights are on the cultural differences and similarities of this great institution. Also examined are the changes which encroached into this institution overtime. Results and conclusion from the research work indicates that the processes involved before taking a wife in O’kun land were rigid with strong attachments to deities this explains why marriages seems to last in this part of the country. In Central Izon, on the other hand, non rigidity made divorce or separation easy.

Keywords: traditional, marriage, procedures, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Izon of Central Niger Delta comprises the following ethnic nationalities: Kaiama, Kolokuma,Opokuma, Ekeptiama, Ighedi, Sabagreia, Sampou, Kalama, Agudama,Bumadi, IkibirirOdi,Agudama, Bumodi, Apoi, Bassan, Tumgbho, Okodia, Boma, (Bumi), Tarakiri, Gharan, Akasa (Akaha)[1]. The North East Yoruba, also known as the O’Kun Yoruba is made up of Ijumu, Yagba West, Yagba East,Bunu-Kabba and Mopa-Amuro Local Government Areas of Kogi State[2]. The family is a fundamental social institution in all societies. U. P. N. Amadi and F. M. C. Amadi (2014) declared that although its particular forms differ substantially from place to place, at any given time in human society and history, a family comes into existence each time marriage is successfully contracted [3]. According to Owagbemi and Fasoranti (2012), in all societies in history, institution building began with the family and this made the families the main vehicles of group identities [4].

Yoruba traditional marriage as opined by Etagene (2014) is not a time to unite two individuals but also an occasion for families and individuals to reunite [5]. In the same light, Robinson (2015) declared that marriage as an institution was not dependent on expensive bride price but a lasting and enduring relationship between bride’s and groom’s families [6]. Arowolaju (2005) equally buttressed this fact as he observed that “among the Yorubas, marriage is between families and not just individual man and woman who met somehow and think they can just live together” [7]. Okede and Wegwu (2014) declared that marriage gives honour and prestige to the man and the woman and provides unity among various decent, lineage and clan, even in time of war [8].
Marriage as an important culture is the starting point of the home which is made up of a man and a woman who play complementary roles to each other. It marks the end and the beginning of a new era between two different individuals who agrees to live together. It is from such relationships that children spring up and if the children are properly trained, they will in turn become good husbands and wives in the society.

For the Yoruba man or woman marriage is a necessity and the union creates everlasting relationships between the homes of their birth. No wonder then Fadipe (1970) declared that:

for a man or woman who has reached the age of marriage to remain single is against mores of the Yoruba. Men get married even when they are sexually impotent in order to save either their face or the faces of their immediate relatives, as well as to get one to look after their domestic establishment. There are a few cases of confirmed bachelors, men who have reached middle age without getting married even though they are in position to do so. But they are a product of modern times with its individualism and are most invariably Christian [9].

Also worthy of note is the fact that marriage is not only necessary to perpetuate society, but in the words of poweigha it is also “to maintain close ties with deceased relations who are believed to be reincarnating. The question of maintaining close relationships explains why people in the clan give names of their deceased parents and of their close relations to newly born babies” [10]. Marriage is an institution and the cultural aspects of it cut across ethnicity and regions in Nigeria. Also of importance is the fact that marriage is believed to be a sacred institution and the celebrations that go with it is a testimony to the importance of this institution not only as a cultural heritage but also an integral part of the society. Ref [3]. Traditional marriage is done according to the tradition of a particular tribe or ethnic group. It has a lot of historical values and varies from tribe to tribe and from regions to regions, it can be unique to a particular family. Traditional marriage is carried out in different stages in Central Izon and O’kun land as discussed extensively in this article.

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN CENTRAL IZON AND O’KUNLAND

The Izon of Central Niger Delta in pre-colonial history practiced different types of marriages such as Opu-Ikia, Ere-dei, Ere-bere, Sagbe, Erepal, Pontua and Duere. Pre-colonial marriages were so complex such that they were classified as “situational Marriages”[11]. In North East Yoruba Land however, one cannot speak of situational marriages, the sanctity and sacredness of this esteemed institution was upheld, such that it was not determined by situations. Traditional marriage began with the mode or method of mate selection. Among the Izon of Central Niger Delta it was both endogamous and exogamous. Their field of eligibility could be from within or anywhere among their neighbours such as Uhrobo, Isoko and Itsekiri. Similarly in O’kun land, mate selection was both endogamous and exogamous. While the people did not frown at getting mate from anywhere, they however encouraged and had preference for endogamous selection. The reason being that, generally among the Yoruba, marriage was between families and not just individual man and woman who met somewhere and think they could live the rest of their lives together.

In the words of Arowolaju (2005), “family must have known all the dark and bright sides of one another. Moreover thorough and painstaking checks were conducted by the two families/lineages to make sure there were no communicable diseases like leprosy, lunacy, insanity or any other genetically transferrable malformations or defects like barrenness” Ref [7].
This explains why choice of a mate or partner was preferably within. So Yagbas, Bunus, Ijumus and owes of O’kun land married within and amongst themselves but they could also get mate outside.

Kala-Ikia And Opu Ika Marriage System.

This was a type of marriage in Central Izon known as “small friendship” and “Big friendship” respectively. It was so called because it was relatively cheap, inexpensive with a low bride wealth attached to it. In a discussion held with Onya Mozi, he referred to it as “Small Dowry” (*Ikiya-ere*) marriage. It was the commonest practiced and most popular marriage in the land[12]. The official sum of money the father received was between thirteen to twenty naira (N13.00-N20.00), mother (N10.00), and the bride herself (N6.00). Descent and inheritance rule in this type of marriage was matrilineal. Offspring’s inherited from both sides. At death the woman’s corpse was returned to her maternal home. This was so because of the Izon believe that he who marries and owns a woman does not own the flesh. *Opu Ikia* marriage was known as the “Big friendship” because it had big or high bride wealth attached to it as opposed to the *Kala ikia*[13]. Though the amount was not fixed it begins from N50, 000.00. The operational dynamism of this marriage system distinguished between male and female children. While the male children belonged to the husband, the female children belonged to the woman and her family. So it’s both matrilineal and patrilineal.

Contrary to the above, in O’kun land and generally in all Yoruba land there was nothing like “small or “Big” marriage. The amount paid as bride wealth did not indicate the importance, “bigness” or “smallness” of the marriage. A woman properly married according to tradition permanently belonged with her children to her husband and family. “Atoku ati Aye (whether alive or dead) she is the man’s. The issue of her corpse returning to her family did not arise and divorce was equally never thought of. This however did not imply that a woman was sold or bought by marriage as it is erroneously believed by some people. The symbolic traditional exchange or payment of bride-wealth, (also very small in O’kun land) did not amount to purchasing a woman, in fact in many families or lineages as declared by Ayodele Philemon; “after the offer and acceptance of the bride price (*Owo-Ori*), the same amount was immediately returned to the groom’s family by the bride’s family with an emphatic statement that their daughter is not for sale but to be cared for”[14].

Bere-Ere Marriage:

The *Bere –Ere* marriage system in Central Izon land carried a high bride wealth ranging from sixty naira (60.000) upwards. In this system a woman was permanently bought and as an owned slave through high bride-wealth. In this system like in O’kun land a woman belonged solely to her husband’s family including all her possessions, so much so she was not permitted to erect a building or sponsor any member of her family in her marital home [15]. In O’kun land however, though a woman solely belonged to her husband she was neither bought nor a slave. She could with the consent of her husband train members of her family and build in her family. Like in North East Yoruba land both male and female children born out of *Bere-ere* marriage belonged and remained in their paternal homes. And similar to O’kun land where a man owned the flesh and the bone, when a *Bere-ere* (woman owned forever) died, she was buried in her husband’s town. According to Beatrice Amah (2014), there was no ceremony in this sort of marriage; the amount paid on this woman made her a bere-ere[16].
In O’kun land marriages were accorded all the traditional marriage ceremonies. However it is important to stress here that no man walked into any family to say he want to (bere) own a girl forever, the situation and the mode under which the marriage was conducted determined that option.

Ere-Dei Marriage:

This type of marriage in Central Izon was a kind of exchange and it occurred when out of carelessness or a deliberate act, one killed a person from within the community or a distant town. As an act of compensation, the person or the relations gives out their sister to take the place of the deceased. This arrangement however entailed an agreement or approval from the culprit’s family before the plan was executed. In O’kun land this type of marriage did not exist. And in contemporary times such hardly exist in the former especially with the presence of magistrate and high court to seek redress for such disastrous acts.

Pawn Or Ere-Pai System Of Marriage:

This system of marriage in central Izon was mostly contracted when one was in trouble or difficulty. Ingiabuna and Obaro (2009) confirmed this when he stated;

Among the Ijos, there was the practice of “pawning” girls for money in conditions of extreme financial distress. As the pawned girl matured into puberty, she is espoused to the pawn broker or his closest kin, and all the children born by her before her redemption belongs to the latter. However, it should be noted that a father could not “pawn” away his daughter without the approval of the girl’s maternal uncle, except in cases of high bride transfer (Opu-ekiye) system of marriage[17].

From the above it is cleared that children born from this marriage were the man’s bere owo (child from a slave or owned woman), it was an abuse or degrading for any family that gave out their daughter through pawning hence the redemption efforts.

“Pawning” as a system of marriage did not exist among the O’kun Yoruba. A man in debt may pawn (Iwofa) his son not daughter to serve the creditor until the debt was paid. So pawning was never associated with marriage. In fact according to an informant, daughters were given into marriage in O’kun land for reasons which include friendship, good character, and the valour of the bride groom or his family. This completely ruled out the ideas of pawning as marriage system[18]. It is good to say here that even in Central Izon this type of marriage does not exist anymore. Modernization has paved way for various loan sources either from banks or other related financial institutions to solve financial problems.

Pon-Tua (Guaranteed System of Marriage)

This was another type of marriage practiced by the Izon of Central Niger Delta before the pre-colonial times. It is similar to bere-ere system of marriage, the difference was that during marriage the parents of the girl would claim replacement if in the course of child birth the girl died. But if the girl was of marriageable age before her death, there would be no replacement. It was assumed the child she delivered had replaced the mother. Less value is now place on this system of marriage and more over it’s so archaic and hardly operational. This type of marriage did not exist at all in O’kun land.
A system of marriage found among the North East Yoruba which was also common to the Izon of Central Niger Delta was marriage by adoption or wife inheritance known as Isupo and duere in Izon land. It was a system where the wife or wives of the deceased was asked to adopt any male member of the family of the husband as a husband, or the deceased family member who showed interest was allowed to have her. It is important to state that both in Izon and O’kun land the practice is greatly dying off such that widows are no longer compelled to marry within the deceased family. They could choose spouse outside but the bride wealth must be returned. Now young widows could choose to remain single, while some may just name a younger man or the deceased son as a husband in principle not in practice.

Ere Mo Tie (Wife Capture/Elopement)

Among the Izon, a suitor may own a woman or elope with a girl if the parents of the girl refused to approve the marriage proposed. The suitor however could come later to properly marry the girl. As mentioned earlier in this discussion, marriage in O’kun Yoruba land was not just an affair between the intending spouses but between the two extended families. The family history of the prospective husband and wife was carried out through the oracle (Orunmila) and Ifa priest (Babalawo). If the oracle was negative, the only choice left to the spouse was to refuse the pronouncement of the oracle and opt to elope. If both become fortunate in life, the man would return to properly marry her. But since a man’s fortunes and safety were guaranteed only as a member of one group of ascription, to separate oneself from the group by elopement would amount to social suicide[19]. It needs be emphasised here that elopement even though was a marriage practice in Izon land, was very rear in O’kun land since no one wanted to go against the keeper of secrets or fortune teller (Babalawo).

A system of marriage whereby a woman married woman for herself was practiced in O’kun land. In most cases this occurred when a woman was barren or if she did not have a male child. If she was financially strong, she married a young lady and give to her husband or any man of her choice. Children from such marriage belonged to the woman and her husband. As an informant (Deborah Oluwi) vividly recount “my elder sister married a Lady for herself whom she gave to her husband”[20].

MARRIAGE PROCESSES/PROCEDURES IN O’KUN YORUBA AND IZON OF CENTRAL NIGER DELTA

The steps and activities leading to O’kun Yoruba marriage were really elaborate and demanding. These steps and activities were not just ceremonial but were equally to test the endurance of the spouse, to ensure they had requisite level of the skills that will enable their family to find its own balance. Successfully going through the steps was an indication that these spouses were a good reflection on the quality of character of their families, and has shown restrain as people who are well brought up, focused, enduring, reliable, discipline and people who were able to defer gratification until they were ready for the responsibility of adulthood. It’s also a test of the level of commitment and patience needed to inculcate a sense of belonging and self-esteem in their children. Ref [7].
To the O’kun Yoruba like all other Yoruba groups, the ability to meet the human needs was critical to their evaluation of the spouses readiness to be united in marriage hence the adage “Ati gbeyawo kekere, owo obe loju” (meaning, it is easy to get married, what is difficult is to provide daily good for the family). In view of this the male was expected to have acquired skills that would enable him provide for his family while the young lady would have been groomed to serve as a little mother, and child-care giver to her young siblings as well as having learnt some preliminary skills she would need to be a wife and a mother from watching her mother and other women in the family. This is similar to the Izon of Central Niger Delta where Amah (2014) recounts that “in the past there was that attachment to the importance of a woman’s ability in the upkeep of the home and small scale fishing, while the men were planting cash crops like cocoa farms, plantation farming and large scale fishing for a living” Ref [11].

The first step or activity in O’kun Yoruba traditional marriage was the time for seeking a potential spouse. This period is called “Igba ifojusode”, which is between the age of 23 and 28 for male adult and between the age of 18 and 25 for a female. Both were expected to be identifying potential spouses. In this phase the potential groom began to visit community’s night markets, local streams (were laundry was carried out mostly by maidens), public squares, and other female centres. Another search method was through friends who have female siblings, and also through potential groom’s sisters. It is also important to state here that at times, parents searched by looking out for a well-behaved child from a reputable home. Sometimes in order to create lasting friendship, parents arranged for a union between their wards. At times some parents made requests right from pregnancy stage, that if a particular woman whom they like give birth to a baby girl, they would like to marry the child for their son. As soon as that agreement was reached, the young boy began to render services like free farming work to the family of the girl.

Regardless of the search method, once a suitable spouse was found, the male child informed his father. The father of the suitor informed the oldest male member (Baba agba) of their extended family (idile).The suitor’s father communicated this in a symbolic language, “elderly father your son has seen a beautiful flower that he thinks he wants to pluck” (Omo yin ti ri ododo elewa ti ofeja). The elderly man replied, “can our family members pluck a flower from that family tree?” (Nje avon ebi wa leja ododo latiru igi bee). The father of the suitor replied, from enquiries made members of our extended family can pluck flowers from the said tree. The elderly man then gave his consent by appointing a respectable wife of the family with proven record of excellent service as a wife and role model for new wives of the lineage, a woman with evidence of intense loyalty to the extended family into which she married, to serve as go-between (Alarina or Alarena).

She carried out her duty as a neutral person. She was endowed with the responsibility of finding out if the spouse would be a good companion of their son and a good resource in the extended family. Parental investigations were also carried out which basically involved consulting some deities like “Ifa” and “Orunmila” to know if the union of their children will be blissful or not. If the go before found out that the spouse’s family were lazy, that their womenfolk were stubborn and incorrigible in their marital home, or if the men in the extended family of the spouse are notorious debtors or have been known to have hereditary diseases; this information would be passed on to the elders, who will subsequently put pressure on their son to discontinue the relationship.
If the enquires revealed that the spouse’s family members were reputable for hard work, respect for elders, a great sense of nurture and motivation to induce their son to excel, in sort, if the oracle was positive (“Ifa fore”) every effort was made to move the relationship to the next step. The process of courtship which till now was private and secretive became a public event with all the formality attached to O’ Kun Yoruba marriage. In Central Izon such detailed protocols and oracle consultation before marriage was consummated was not the practice.

Among the Izon of central Niger Delta, the first marriage procedure was called wari nimi-uru meaning (Introductory drinks). This brought both families together. An emissary was sent by the man and his family to propose marriage. If this request was acceptable by her family they would also go through investigation process on their proposed son-in-law before the wari-Nimi-uru. Where he was found suitable, he was invited to appear before the parent of the girl, which the proposed son-in-law would do in company of his kinsmen with 4 bottles of native gin. This implies that marriage in Izon land is not an individual affair but both families and their kinsmen were involved. And according to king Agara, the Onya Mozi of Kolokuma villages “both the family of the groom and the bride must sit together for the ceremony”[21]. This wari-nimi-uru signified that the girl was now engaged. In O’kun land it was not an easy affair like this.

The second marriage step in O’kun Yoruba land was called “Isiun,” meaning “I have accepted your proposal” or “voice opening”. Before now the lady, as it were might have agreed but would be playing hide game. Now she felt it was time to consent and move the relationship forward. So the equivalent of N10 was paid to the bride as “Isiun” to literally release her voice to converse. In most places in O’Kun land, this “Isiun” was included in the bride-wealth list and taken on the engagement day. This is similar to what the Izon of Central Niger Delta called bibi fini ye (sufficient money to open her month). The difference however was that while the O’kun Yoruba performed “Isiun” as a distinct ceremony, in Central Izon land it formed just part of marriage procedure and process particularly during the second sitting when the lady made her public appearance before the two families. The husband to be, then bibifini her before a host of invited guests. Another thing that was also common to both areas at this stage was that the engaged man and woman were not expected to have anything in common including pre-marital relationships. However, youth of nowadays see nothing wrong in mating before marriage.

Next in the series of steps and activities in O’kun traditional marriage system was request or begging for the young woman’s hand in marriage called “Itoro” (borrowing or family solicitation). This was conducted between the male elders of the suitor and the lady’s families. The family of the suitor paid a visit to the extended family of the lady. The father of the girl usually responded to the suitor’s family by saying, it was not his right but that of the elder to give out his daughter in marriage. He would then take the visitors to the eldest man of the family (baba agha), where other senior members of the spouse lineage were waiting. Emphasis on this was that “Itoro” which took place in the house of the eldest man was a clear indication that marriage was a business between all the members of the extended family, as the two families became united in a very special way through the union of the two people in marriage. Ref. [20]. Before the two families depart a date was set for the next important ceremony called “Idana”.

This above step can be liken to what the Izon of Central Niger Delta called Dein ke/ssa-gbe ifie, whereby a family conducted a visit and fix a date to perform the marriage ceremony. This was usually referred as first sitting or introduction in Izon land. This was done with the knowledge and acceptance of the bride’s family.
The “Idana” (Bethrothal or creation of the affinal bond) followed the “Itoro” step in O’kun Yoruba land. It centred on the payment of the bride wealth and it was the first official public request of a female child in marriage from her family. The Yoruba term for bride-wealth literally translate “Owo Ori” (“money for the head”). But in actual fact it had little to do with the transfer of economic resources as price for the wife to be. Yoruba families did not succumb to the idea of putting monetary value on the head of their daughter. Materials requested and gifts given in this ceremony by the suitor’s family had very little economic worth. They merely signified the symbolic values for enhancing the goals and objectives of the Yoruba family. Ref [7]. Comparatively, the Owo Ori (Money for the head) is the same with the tebe sa ngbe of the Central Niger Delta who are of the view that wives are no commodities for sale and this explains why the original bride wealth was of a meagre amount. Below are items requested by obligation for a traditional marriage in O’kun land. These items were symbolic and served for prayers that reinforced what was desirable and necessary to make marriage and indeed life successful:

BRIDAL LIST /BRIDAL WEALTH

1) Honey (Oyin): I bottle. Symbolising that the couples life will be as sweet as honey and be blessed with promising children. Sugar, 2 packets: same symbolic value as honey.

2) Salt (Iyo): 1 bag. Salt sweetens and preserves, that the couple would be preserved, live long and see their children’s children

3) Palm Oil (Epo Papa): 10 litres. It reduces harsh taste of pepper in the soup and it is of antidotal value, suggesting in prayer that no evil would befall the couple, and that harsh impact of difficult times would be ameliorated.

4) Kolanut (Obi abata with four halves): 100 pieces. Kolanut produces prolifically, may your wife be fertile as the Kolanut and be blessed with many surviving children and do well in life.

5) Bitter Kola (Orogbo): 42 pieces. This represents old age, prosperity, signifying that the couple would live long life in health and see generations of their children.

6) Alligator Pepper (Atare): this comes in a pod with multiple seed, symbolizing blessing, healthy and prosperous children for the couple.

7) Local wine (Oti – sepete) and palm wine (emu fifun): This represents water which is use and is treasured for its multiple uses. Since no one ever dislike, hated or speak evil of water, so the couple would live a peaceful life, free from hatred and dislike.

8) Money (owo): this is money; it is needed for fulfilment and enjoyment of life. May you be blessed with plenty of it in your lifetime.

Other Items Include:


10) Owo Iya omo (bride’s mother is cash): N10.00 now N2,000.00.

11) Owo Ijoko ebi (family sitting): N 10.00 now N2,000.00.

12) Owo Iyawo ile (cash for family wives (wives married into the extended family): N 5.00 now N1,000.00

13) Owo Isiun (bride mouth opening): N10.00 now N2,000.00.
14) Owo a won Omo ile (cash for children in the extended family): 50k now ₦1,000.00.
15) Owo egbon omo (Bride elder brother): 50k now ₦1,000.00
16) Owo owe (farm labour): 50k now ₦2,000.00
17) Owo Aso (Bride’s clothing, box full of assorted clothing): Jewellery, a pair of shoe etc.
18) Owo Isin Yawo (escort fees): 50know ₦2,000.00
19) Owo Iwe (Money for collecting list): 50k now ₦1,000.00
20) Umbrella for the bride: 1.
21) Yam tubers (Isu): 50pieces.
22) Dry fish (Eja gbigbe): 2 – 4 big pieces
23) Big Pig (elede): 1 or Big goat (ewure)
24) Cabin Biscuit: 1 packet.

With these items prayers were offered by the families and the “Idana” ceremony legitimised couple’s relationships.

It appears that the Izon of Central Niger Delta seemed to combine the “Isium” and “Idana” ceremonies of the North East Yoruba in marriage ceremony called wari nimi-uru and Dein ketebe sa-gbe ifie (Getting a date and payment of bride wealth). According to Isaac Komokou[22], the bride wealth of ₦26.00 was paid along with some other items outline below:

1) Igoni Kumou – uru (drinks offered by the bride’s family): 2 bottles.
3) Weni tugba uru (drinks for the explanation of mission by the bridegrooms’ entourage): 1 bottle.
4) Igoni-out uru zuye (fee for off-loading the canoes of luggage’s brought by the bridegroom): 40k-forty kobo.
5) Wari-nimi uru (drinks presented by the groom’s entourage to ensure smooth discussion)
6) Ere nana iru (drinks for the bride’s family for acceptance of marriage).
7) Tin bo ye (Errandman’s fee for initiating of the bride, N500.00): This is negotiable.
8) Bibi finiye (drinks for opening of the bride’s mouth to formally declare whether or not the Family should accept the marriage drinks).
9) Kosobo infinya (Elders’ snuff): ₦200.00.
10) Dodo ye (drinks to cool down the lap, from two bottles upward).
11) Inabibina bibi sei / Inabina sei sei(to accept abuse in advance): wine, cigarette and snuff
12) Tebe sa-gbe uru (Drinks to accompany the payment of the bride wealth): bottle of wine for the father, mother and the bride.
13) Teri-bide ( a loin cloth for covering)
14) Yengi bo ye: cash plus canoe (aru)
15) Ede (yam barn)
16) Tobou ma ye mo preceded by ekpeti tun diye uro (drinks for the inspection of the bride’s box): Women from the bride family carried out the inspection. The box usually is a Trunk box which should contain umbrella, 2 pairs of pants, 2 under wears or skirts, 1 pair of brassier, shoes, hollandais wax wrapper, George wrapper, painted and decorated paddle and mirror.
Looking at the bride list for Central Izon they were not items used majorly for prayer as it was in O’kun land. Also, while Izon bride list was flooded with drinks, that of O’ Kun land was mostly material and cash. However in contemporary times in both areas of study, most of these items are now monetized, and prayers are offered to God instead of strictly involving ancestral worship particularly in Izon land.

The final step of the marriage process among the O’kun Yoruba was called *Igbe yawo*, that is the solemnization of the couple in the presence of all families and well-wishers. On this day, the bride and the groom gorgeously dressed in traditional attire were told the simple truth about the new and permanent home, a school where she will never graduate (*ile-eko*). The bride was counselled on how to live, and to care for her husband, his relations and other family members. The groom was advised be to a good provider, a kind, loving and caring husband. The ceremony was concluded with prayers and the bride was handed over to the most senior male in the groom’s family. It was a day of celebration eating, drinking and dancing for parents, relatives of the couple and their families. No wonder Etagene (2014) declared that traditional marriage ceremony even though a serious affair is full of playful banter, rich Nigerian music, graceful colours and sumptuous meals. Ref [5].

The bride was then escorted by family and friends to the door step of her new home. Before she entered into her husband’s house, she was prayed for and her legs were washed. By this act she’s believed to be washing away every bad luck that she might have brought into her husband’s house. On the wedding night the couple were to have their first meeting and she was ordinarily expected to be a virgin. If it was positive, it was jubilation for the man and the bride’s family as the blood-stained white cloth (signifying her virginity) used for the night was usually shown to the bride’s family the following morning. But if she was not found a virgin she and her parents were disgraced and might be banished from the village where they live. It was a social and family dishonour and disgrace for a bride not to be found as a virgin on the night of the wedding when the traditional marriage was consummated.
The part three which was the final traditional marriage ceremony and farewell among the Izon of Central Niger Delta was called Ere nana uge/Domo mu. This ceremony like the final step in O’kun land was a joyous occasion with feasting that attracted friends as well as relations. The women involved in preparation of assorted food for that day were given 4 bottles of drinks for their labour, the sister of the bride received some amount of money (N16.00) though not static from the groom called Ere-owomo fi yo (Money for the sisters). The last person to leave the scene benefited with 2 bottles of gin called tu kobo ebieri (the last people’s share) and finally, drinks to end the ceremony called tu seri mo ye were given. The bride was escorted to the bride groom’s residence with some amount of money. This was referred to as Dou mo mu ye. This was taken in form of cash by the sisters. In the past, traditional marriage concluded all marriage rites, but today, there is a high craze for church/ mosque wedding even after the traditional marriage. Parental role in mate selection was dictatorial due to the value attached to mate selection. Today, parents’ role is more of advice.

CONCLUSION

As David Henige (1982) opined, “for anything to be regarded as a tradition, it should be widely practiced in a society and must have been handed down for at least a few generations”[23]. In this paper therefore attempt has been made to compare and contrast the traditional marriage systems, procedures and practices in O’kun land and among the Izon of Central Niger Delta. From pre-colonial times, situational marriages though existed is no longer operational which can be understood from the fact that society generally is dynamic and modernisation has affected situational marriages. It is discovered that owning a wife in both areas of study was not an easy thing, due to processes and procedures involved. The study shows that processes involved before taking a wife in O’kun land was rigid, not flexible with strong attachment to natural deities. This explains why marriage seemed to last in that part of the country. Proper selection of mates through counselling and cultural practices tended to drastically reduce the rate of divorce. Where as in Central Izon, there was no rigidity; it was flexible such that spouses found it easy to separate even just after the first sitting which seemed to make divorce or separation an easy affair in that area until recently when modernization, court weddings tend to stabilize marriage. The differences in procedures notwithstanding, both societies had what were socially acceptable relationships between a man and a woman. The union of a man and a woman cemented relationships among families, creating a lasting bond and communal unity in both areas of study.

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[16] Ibid pp.56.


